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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the conceptual reform of university-based graduate level administrator preparation programs. The functionalist, interpretative, and critical approaches to social science have important implications for the study of motivation, decision-making, communication and leadership. Interpretative and critical approaches must be woven into the fabric of the present functionalist approach which undergirds course content in the study of educational administration. These approaches will create appropriately new paradigms and models for the analysis of selected administrative processes. (JAM)

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REFORMING THE EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION CURRICULUM

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These are troubled times for the study of educational administration. The optimism that the New Movement of the 1950s and 1960s would lead to a rigorous body of knowledge about administration was already waning when Greenfield (1975) and later other critics (Bates, 1982; Deblois, 1979; Hodgkinson, 1978a, 1978b; Foster, 1980, 1984) challenged the prevailing orthodoxy. As a consequence of the ensuing debates, probably only those scholars who are most highly committed to a functionalist perspective remain confident that the dominant orientation defines the right course for the further development of educational administration. Concomitant with the emerging doubts about the appropriate conceptual bases for the field of study, questions have been raised about the relevance of university-based programs for the preparation of educational administrators. The questions have prompted action as a variety of administrator training models, some with limited university involvement, have appeared on the scene (Murphy & Hallinger, 1987). Developments such as these suggest that the status and content of university-based administrator preparation programs warrant attention.

The purpose of this paper is to explore some possibilities for developing the content of administrative studies which are suggested by interpretive and critical approaches in the social sciences. Implicitly, a number of fundamental questions are addressed: "What does one study when one studies educational

administration?" "On what knowledge base should the practice of educational administration rest?" and "How might that knowledge base be developed?" An assumption underlying the paper is that an area of graduate-level study defined as educational administration is an essential facet of the complex that constitutes the study and practice of educational administration. Without a sound conceptual base, the credibility of the entire field becomes problematic.

The general approach adopted in the paper is to review the nature of the alternative perspectives in the social sciences, to assess their implications for the content of the educational administration curriculum, and then to suggest some possible approaches to developing that content. A limitation of the analysis is the exclusive emphasis on social science perspectives. This particular focus does not permit giving adequate recognition to the important contributions made to developing the conceptual base for the study of educational administration by areas such as philosophy and educational theory, research, and professional practice.

Alternative Perspectives

The prevailing paradigms or modes of theorizing in the social sciences may offer some indication of possible supplementary or alternative content for the curriculum of educational administration. Four alternative sociological paradigms have been described by Burrell and Morgan (1979): functionalist, interpretive, radical humanist and radical

structuralist. Bredo and Feinberg (1982) presented their overview of competing modes of social and educational research by focusing on positivistic, interpretive and critical approaches. Similarly, Carr and Kemmis (1986) have examined the theory-practice relationship in education from natural scientific, interpretive and critical perspectives. The remainder of this paper is based on the assumption that the differences among functionalist, interpretive and critical approaches to social science have important implications for the study of educational administration.

Culbertson (1981) concluded his analysis of alternative epistemologies for the study of educational administration -- logical positivism, hermeneutics and critical theory -- with some provocative questions about the relative merits of the three approaches. In particular, he asked: "Would knowledge established by exponents of a given school of thought, when used as the core training, lead to very different preparatory program and training results than would knowledge established by exponents of another school of thought when used in the same way?" (p. 5). Although there has been much discussion about alternative paradigms and epistemologies in the intervening years, the questions raised by Culbertson do not seem to have received the attention which they deserve. Indeed, the specific implications which alternative perspectives on administration have for the curriculum of administrative studies appears to have been largely ignored.

An effort to address that oversight might begin with an examination of the nature of functionalist, interpretive and critical approaches to social science theorizing. Each of these modes of thought involves different conceptions of the nature of the phenomena that administrators encounter, of the major administrative responsibilities and of the knowledge on which administrative practice might be based.

Functionalist Approach

The "administration as science" perspective, grounded in positivism and functionalism, is so deeply entrenched in the curriculum of educational administration that a description is hardly necessary. Nevertheless, a brief review may be helpful in order to develop the contrasts with the other two approaches.

Within a functionalist approach, the social world takes on an objectivity and a concreteness similar to that of the physical world. Social phenomena are assumed to have underlying regularities which can be discovered through empirical research using the established methods of science. Schools and school systems are assumed to have characteristics similar to those of other organizations and, like them, to be shaped by internal and external forces. Essentially, they have definable structures and serve as means for attaining goals through collective action. In schools, the goals revolve around bringing about desired changes in students who are viewed as relatively passive agents as they are processed through the system.

Administrators are viewed as having prime responsibility for

activities intended to accomplish the mission of an organization effectively and efficiently. Specific tasks include designing structures, establishing systems of operation and controlling activities. Organizations, understood through the use of either mechanistic or organismic metaphors, are assumed to have a variety of needs. Administrators are charged with the responsibility of ensuring that these needs are fulfilled. The work of administrators is defined largely in technical and instrumental terms; administrative tasks primarily involve selecting the most appropriate means to achieve given ends.

What is the nature of the knowledge base for administrative practice within this perspective? First, administrators should know the substance of administrative and educational science as established through research. In particular, they should know the various means for achieving particular ends and the effectiveness of those means under varying circumstances. Administrative knowledge should enable practitioners to predict the consequences of alternative courses of action. In addition, administrators should possess the skills or competencies which will enable them to select and to apply the means effectively.

Interpretive Approach

An interpretive approach in the social sciences rests on a very different conception of the nature of the social world from that associated with the functionalist/positivistic perspective. Particular emphasis is placed on differences between people and other living beings and also on differences between the social

and the physical world. Unlike other creatures, people are assumed to have distinctive qualities: they act with purpose, and they are able to reflect on their actions. The social world is a created world which is formed and reformed through human interaction. What appears to be objective reality is, fundamentally, a shared construct of what the social world is and should be like. Organizations are social phenomena resulting primarily from interactions which are meaningful to the participants. They are characterized by endless variety and diversity. Rather than being simply structures for achieving certain ends, organizations are complex processes in a fluid setting. The indeterminate nature of the activities reduces the possibility of systematization. Ends are not readily separated from means; values are pervasive.

In this view of the social world administrators become prime participants, by virtue of position and power, in the ongoing creation of organizations. Defining shared values through the communication of intentions and meanings becomes an important administrative task. Multiple and changing goals are assumed; consequently, administrative activities in an organization are characterized by the flexible direction and redirection of activities.

The knowledge which administrators require within the interpretive perspective on the social world is largely personal and practical. In general, this involves understanding how organizations are created and sustained. Ideally, administrators

should know intuitively and through thoughtful reflection how others make sense of their organizational experiences. Administrators should have the personal skills and qualities which will enable them to participate actively in negotiating and defining meanings. Because means are not separated from ends, administrators' actions must satisfy moral as well as technical criteria. Within a created social world, knowledge changes as the context changes. Professional knowledge grows as practitioners act and reflect upon their actions. As administrators and other participants modify their actions, the organization (as a created order) undergoes change.

Critical Approaches

In some respects, critical social science draws on aspects of both the functionalist and the interpretive approaches; however, it should not be viewed as a synthesis. A critical approach accepts the existence of social structures which have the appearance of objective reality; these structures are rooted in history and provide the context within which people act. Through the assignment of meanings and human action, the structures are reinforced and replicated. Consequently, the creation of organizations is a continuous process. A specific feature of the structures which are created and re-created is that they are characterized by differentials in the distribution of benefits and rewards. Human beings may not be served adequately or equitably by the structures. Instead, people may feel oppressed by and alienated from the social world.

The oppressive conditions result, in part, from the way in which people understand their circumstances. Because the social world is in a state of becoming, oppressive conditions can be overcome and changed.

From a critical perspective, administrators and other organizational members are viewed as participating in a social-historical process. The major task of the administrator involves transforming social structures through reflection and action; fundamental change may be involved. Themes which emerge in descriptions of the work of administrators include empowering people, liberating and emancipating them from oppressive conditions, and developing human potential. Since organizations should serve human ends, an important task of administrators is to ensure that the structures do not become a source of domination. Furthermore, administrators should search for contradictions in the organization and find ways in which they can be eliminated. Above all, administrators have the responsibility to act truly and justly while engaging in deliberate action to achieve a just and equitable social world.

In order to fulfill their responsibilities, administrators must be able to understand organizations in a cultural and historical context. More specifically, they should be able to understand how others experience organizational life and are affected by that life. They must be able not only to sustain an organization but also to work towards its transformation. Consequently, a knowledge of how fundamental change can be

accomplished is highly important. In addition, administrators should have knowledge which enables them to view organizations from different perspectives, including that of other participants. Knowledge of self is important because self-understanding is a prerequisite for proper conduct and action.

Curriculum Implications

What do these different perspectives and approaches have to offer to thought about the curriculum of educational administration? Does one have any superiority over the others as the conceptual base for understanding educational administration and for how people might prepare themselves to be administrators? The answer to questions such as these probably is that each one has the potential to make a distinctive contribution to our thinking about the substance of administrative studies.

The fundamental and far-reaching changes advocated by articulate critics of the functionalist/positivistic orientation of studies in educational administration would require not only a dramatic conversion on the part of most professors of educational administration but a major task of curriculum development as well. Perhaps a more limited and modest approach would also be more effective in bringing about change. When viewed globally and in the abstract, administration is a complex activity. Depending on the nature of the position, an administrator may have to be able to call on a variety of forms of knowledge -- some of it will be technical, some of it will be grounded in personal experience and some of it will involve

conceptions of what is desirable in the operation of a particular organization. In other words, a reasonable assumption would seem to be that administrators should have recourse to knowledge that is grounded in all of the major approaches to social science theorizing -- functionalist, interpretive and critical.

The major criticism which can be directed at the current definition of the field of study is not that it contains functionalist/positivistic or technical elements; these are important aspects of the practice of administration. Indeed, all those who have practiced administration have an appreciation for the extent to which apparently insignificant technical activities consume each day. The problems of applying theory to practice notwithstanding, much of the content of current administrative studies is oriented toward technical/instrumental considerations which are not totally irrelevant to administrators.

Instead, the major shortcoming of the current curriculum of educational administration is the almost exclusive reliance on functionalist/positivistic modes of viewing the world, of defining knowledge and of theorizing to the almost total exclusion of other perspectives. The limitations of this orientation have been examined effectively by Greenfield (1986) and do not require repetition. The proposal advanced in this paper is that the curriculum of educational administration would be enhanced in significant ways if interpretive and critical approaches to phenomena which are of interest to administrators

were added to the current content of administrative of studies.

At the basis of this suggestion is the assumption that interpretive and critical approaches would facilitate a consideration of issues that are dealt with inadequately from a functionalist approach. In addition, these perspectives might draw attention to issues and problems that are totally overlooked by exclusive reliance on established modes of theorizing.

Illustrations relating to this point may be drawn from the emphasis which appears to characterize standard approaches in various areas of administrative study. The three selected for present purposes are policy studies, law and economics. In order to emphasize the major point, generalizations are made about these areas which are intended to capture the essence of the orientation. These are not meant either to distort or to disparage; however, they may have that appearance. Some aspects of the general orientations are summarized in Table 1.

In a functionalist approach to policy studies, the main focus seems to be on developing and testing models of rational policy making. Similar interests direct attention in the examination of policy implementation. In functionalist studies of law and education, an understanding of legal requirements and of their relationship to the general structure of the law is considered to be important. Cases and precedents are studied, and administrative actions which conform to the law serve as exemplars. Economic studies are oriented towards principles of economics in the public sector and models related to resource

allocation decisions. Knowledge about these aspects of policy, law and economics is clearly important to educational administrators.

Table 1

Emphases in Functionalist, Interpretive and Critical Approaches to Selected Areas of Study

Functionalist	Interpretive	Critical
	Policy Studies	
Models of rational policy making and of policy implementation	Policies as experienced by those who make policy or are affected by policy implementation	Historical and social determinants of policies; evaluation of policies on basis of rightness, justice and equity
	Law	
Substance of legal requirements; cases and precedents; application of the law	Basis of individual compliance with legal requirements; interpretations of the law	Differential impact of the law; social context of legal requirements; contradictions
	Economics	
Principles of economics; models for allocating resources; budgets; analysis of expenditures	Meanings associated with variations in allocations; value assigned to economic considerations	Social and political basis of inequities; structural changes required to reduce differentials

An interpretive approach adds a new dimension to each of these areas. In policy studies, an interpretive orientation directs attention to those aspects of process which are important

and meaningful to participants. Consideration can also be given to the meanings and understandings which are important in translating policy into practice. A similar emphasis emerges in the legal studies area. Attention is directed to the basis of complying with legal requirements and to subjective interpretations of the law. An interpretive approach to economics might include attention to the meanings which are attributed to variations in the allocations of resources and to how people explain and understand their present economic circumstances.

The critical approaches to policy studies, law and economics have a number of aspects in common. First, attention is directed to the historical, cultural and social basis of present practice. Second, questions about how the shortcomings of present practice might be alleviated are a major area of interest. Policies are examined within this context, and the differential impact of policies on different groups is examined. Similarly the law and legal requirements are assessed in terms of rightness and justice. In an economic analysis, particular attention is given to inequities in access to resources and ways in which they might be eliminated.

Clearly, the focus which has been attributed to the interpretive and critical approaches in these illustrations are not excluded entirely in current definitions of these areas of study. However, these types of issues probably could be addressed much more adequately within the alternative approaches,

given the characteristics described earlier in the paper.

Possible Changes in Specific Areas

Although major changes to particular areas of study have potential for redefining the substance of the curriculum, such changes may not be practicable or feasible. Inability to consider major restructuring need not be an impediment to significant curriculum development. Interpretive and critical approaches have potential to enhance the examination of specific topics within the general area of administrative studies. Four have been selected for illustrative purposes: motivation, decision making, communication and leadership. Virtually every basic text in administration includes these topics or deals with them in some implicit way. Topics such as these would receive a distinctively different emphasis in an interpretive or critical approach from that associated with a functionalist perspective. The new emphasis would contribute in significant ways to increasing the depth of understanding which administrators have of important areas of their work. In addition, alternative emphases in the modes and substance of research are suggested by interpretive and critical approaches.

The emphasis in functionalist, interpretive and critical approaches to the four topics is summarized in Table 2. To a considerable degree, the essence of the functionalist orientation is drawn from Hoy and Miskel (1987) while the interpretive and critical orientations are somewhat more speculative.

Table 2

Focus of Functionalist, Interpretive and Critical Approaches to Analysis of Selected Administrative Processes

Functionalist	Interpretive	Critical
	Motivation	
External and internal forces which shape behavior; control to achieve goals of organizations	People's purposes and intentions; reasons why they commit themselves to organizational goals	Ways in which objectified social conditions frustrate meaningful activity
	Decision Making	
Steps or stages in effective decision making; managing decision processes	Nature of decision making as experienced by individuals; meaning of participation	Social and historical constraints on both process and outcome; differential effects of decisions
	Communication	
Modes and means of communication; models of effective communication	Empathy and understanding; symbolic basis of communicative acts	Social and cultural factors which inhibit communication; group language differences
	Leadership	
Processes for exercising influence in pursuit of collective goals	Understanding the experiences of leader and follower; acceptance of leadership	Access to positions of leadership; domination and alienation; value bases of leader's goals

Motivation

A functionalist approach to analyzing motivation focuses primarily on describing the external and internal forces which shape human behavior. Students of administration study the determinants of human behavior, contrast various models for explaining and predicting behavior, and theorize about the manipulation of organizational incentives. Attention is also given to the situational factors which impinge upon the effectiveness of incentives and rewards. An administrator's knowledge about motivation is oriented not so much toward understanding people as it is toward controlling them in the interest of attaining organizational ends.

In an interpretive approach to motivation, the focus shifts to understanding the intentions and purposes which move people to commit themselves to certain actions. Theorizing is developed around the voluntary nature of human behavior; prime questions relate to why people choose to act in particular ways. Instead of focusing on the manipulation of incentives, an interpretive analysis of motivation is concerned more with the meanings attached to incentives and rewards by organizational participants. The analysis is based on the assumption that subjective meanings are more significant in human motivation than are objective incentives.

A major concern in a critical approach to motivation revolves around understanding how objectified social conditions facilitate or frustrate meaningful activities. Studying

motivation includes attempting to answer questions about how social structure influences people's aspirations and the choices which they make. In addition, attention is given to structural changes that would tend to reduce people's frustration with, and alienation from, their work. Administrators are particularly interested in how work can be made more meaningful and fulfilling. This is a question which tends to be overlooked in the functionalist concern for control and the interpretive interest in understanding.

Decision Making

From a functionalist perspective, the prime interest in the study of decision making is to identify steps or stages in the process of making decisions in an effective and efficient manner. As is the case in the study of motivation, the adequacy of different models for explaining decision processes is assessed. The analysis suggests that prospective administrators should be interested in strategies for controlling decision making processes, for increasing the predictability of implementation efforts and for managing participation in decision making.

Studies about decision making based on an interpretive approach revolve around understanding decision processes from the perspective of the participants. In contrast to the almost exclusive emphasis on administrative aspects of decision making in a functionalist view, the interpretive approach reflects an interest in all participants. More specific topics are likely to

include consideration of how members of the organization interpret decisions as well as how they justify their responses to decisions. Participation in decision making is examined in terms of the interpretations which organizational members place on such arrangements and the extent to which participants find them meaningful.

A critical approach to decision making focuses on the historical and social constraints in relation to both the process and substance of decisions. With respect to outcomes, particular attention is given to the differential effects of decisions on different groups; who benefits and who loses as a result of certain decisions is an important consideration. Attention is directed also on who actively participates in and who is excluded from the decision process. From an administrative perspective, empowering those who are affected by, but who do not participate in, the decision making process is an important consideration.

Communication

Studies of communication from a functionalist perspective revolve around modes, means and techniques of communication in organizations. Comparisons are made between different models for understanding communication processes. Included in these models are those which have a strong technological or telecommunications basis. Administrative strategies which are discussed relate to eliminating barriers which impede the flow of information through communication channels and networks, facilitating downward

communication, and improving personal communication skills.

The symbolic basis of communication is a significant aspect of an interpretive approach to analyzing and understanding these phenomena. Questions addressed include "How do people assign meanings to different communicative acts?" and "What human characteristics or qualities make communication possible?" The role of empathy and understanding in communication is also of interest. An interpretive approach contributes to an administrator's understanding of communication as an intensely human rather than as a technical process.

The particular emphasis which a critical approach contributes to an understanding of communication relates to the social, cultural and historical factors which impede or facilitate communication. In addition, the ways in which communication patterns in an organization reflect characteristics of the social context are also included in the analysis. The language used in communication is examined from the perspective that this is a potential barrier to meaningful communication. Differences in the language used by different categories of organizational members is of particular interest. Indeed, the language of administration would be examined to assess ways in which this inhibits meaningful communication and masks contradictions in the operation of organizations.

Leadership

Studies of leadership in the functionalist mode direct attention primarily to the processes through which influence is

exercised in the pursuit of organizational goals. A long standing interest has revolved around the personality traits of effective leaders as well as on how situational factors moderate the relationship between leader behavior and effectiveness. As is the case in relation to other aspects of administration, the relative merits of different models for explaining leadership are examined. The improvement of leadership skills and competencies may also be emphasized in the training of administrators.

From an interpretive perspective, understanding the meaning of "leading" and "following" from the standpoint of those involved becomes important. The ways in which both leaders and followers justify their actions to themselves is also relevant. Rather than focusing solely on the actions of a leader, interpretive studies also direct attention to why followers accept the initiatives taken by leaders. The processes through which leaders form and shape the understandings of other organizational members would also be of interest from an administrative perspective.

In addition to placing leadership in a historical context, a critical analysis examines differential access to positions of leadership, particularly as this affects minority groups. Leadership is analyzed as a form of domination and as a possible contributor to alienation not just as a positive force in an organization. Attention is also directed at the consequences of placing major responsibility for leadership in an organization within the administrative structure. Throughout a critical

analysis, major attention would be directed at the value bases of leadership and the directions in which leaders might lead.

Prospects and Problems

If the proposal sketched in this paper seems to have merit, then one curriculum development task is to identify and perhaps redefine the topics that seem to warrant attention within a broader conceptual base than that offered by functionalism. A second task is to locate or develop the instructional materials that would facilitate the examination of the new approaches. In order for this work to proceed, a number of possible barriers to curriculum change have to be confronted.

First, the orientations of many professors towards functionalist approaches may contribute to both personal and practical problems. Having been schooled in a particular way of looking at the world, the plausibility of supplementary or alternative perspectives may seem problematic; consequently, the motivation to do the work may be low. Second, some scholars probably will find the assumptions underlying interpretive and critical approaches unacceptable; they may reject them as valid approaches to understanding administrative and organizational phenomena. Circumstances such as these simply mean that those who are persuaded of the merits of the alternatives will have to bear more of the curriculum development load.

There is also, of course, a conceptual problem in that some of the assumptions underlying these perspectives are incompatible. This may be more of a problem in relation to

research than to developing curriculum materials. Basing research on modes of theorizing which involve contradictory assumptions is clearly unwise. However, deriving insights from studies which are based on different assumptions does not present the same type of problem.

A more practical problem is that the proposal seems to suggest an expansion of an already full curriculum. Indeed, this is probably a major deterrent to curriculum development activities. There are only obvious solutions to this problem. First, some economies may be realized through an overall grounding in the general nature of functionalist, interpretive and critical approaches which will reduce the need to develop basic concepts in relation to specific topics. Second, some choices will have to be made within particular topics or courses. Individual professors will make these decisions on the basis of purposes and on the readiness of learners for various concepts. Regardless of the specific approach, every student should be thoroughly grounded in the conceptual bases on which the study of educational administration rests.

Conclusion

Progress in reforming the educational administration curriculum is more likely to take place on a broken front than through efforts at global transformations. The curriculum will change as professors and departments experiment with teaching new concepts derived from different areas such as the interpretive and critical approaches in the social sciences. If this strategy

were widely adopted and if there were adequate communication about curriculum innovations, over time there should be a sorting out of concepts and of general conceptualizations. Some might atrophy while others might come into prominence. Differences in conceptual bases may be reconciled in emerging approaches to the study of administration. The dominant paradigm might change as we experiment with new content for teaching educational administration. At this stage, the exploration and testing of alternative concepts is more important than the ultimate fate of the paradigm or perspective on which the concepts are based. The intent of this paper is to encourage such experimentation.

Note

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